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Woodbury after school instructor Cayol Ryan (center, back) leads students in a parachute and ball activity last week.

photo by Vanessa Fournier

Jury Trial Going Forward for 2015 Greensboro Murder Case

by Michael Bielawski

NEWPORT — State and defense attorneys working on the case of the shooting death of Lou Ron Schneider in 2015 in Greensboro met on Friday at the Orleans County Criminal Court in Newport to discuss a potential trial date.

Earlier in the week, Judge Robert Best denied a motion to dismiss the second-degree murder and voluntary manslaughter charges against the defendant, Ryan Bacon, who was age 30 at the time he was accused of shooting Schneider.

On Aug. 23 of 2015, Bacon allegedly got into an argument with Schneider at his home on the Head Road in Greensboro, which resulted in Bacon shooting Schneider. He survived long enough to tell Hardwick Police Detective Kevin

Lehos that it was Bacon who shot him.

Bacon had initially fled the scene, then he turned himself into police at the Hardwick Police Station the next day. The gun that was allegedly used was found in the woods by police.

Schneider's son, Heath Schneider, was at the house at the time of the shooting. According to a motion to dismiss document filed by Bacon's defense lawyer, Jon D. Valangaio, Heath Schneider's story changed throughout the investigation.

Schneider initially claimed he witnessed his father's shooting. He said his father had demanded that Bacon leave his property and that Bacon then went to his truck, where he retrieved a rifle and came back to shoot Lou Ron Schneider.

Then, several weeks later, when Heath Schneider was questioned by state police detective sergeant Jacob Zorn, he said he did not see the shooting, after all. Valangaio's motion to dismiss document states that Bacon had a gun.

"Regarding his inconsistent and ever-changing story as to what he saw and heard, lead investigator Vincent St. Pierre, Detective Jacob Zorn, stated in his deposition, there have been significant inconsistencies regarding Heath Schneider's accounting of what happened on the fact that Heath had differences in his stories that have been significantly inconsistent definitely cause me concern."

According to the motion to dismiss, another issue which Valangaio disputes is whether Lou Ron Schneider had a gun and was threatening Bacon before the fatal shooting occurred. Valangaio alleges the possibility that a gun could have been removed from Lou Ron Schneider before investigators arrived at the scene.

In the motion, he further argues that it was the fault of law enforcement for not thoroughly investigating all possibilities in the initial scene. He said police should have examined every firearm on the premise, of which there were many.

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Representative Peter Welch Visits Hardwick

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK — On Thursday, U.S. Representative Peter Welch (D-Vt.) toured the Northeast Kingdom to speak with constituents about their issues and concerns. During a 45-minute stop at the Memorial Building, the topics ranged from agriculture to state health care. More than a dozen area residents attended the Hardwick sessions.

One theme of the discussion was the amount of division in Washington and among the American public. "It's worrisome," Welch said. "I've been serving 12 years and I haven't seen the kind of dysfunction that we've had [recently]."

He referenced the impact of social media, cable networks, and polarization, which drives individuals toward the extremes of the political spectrum.

"Right now, it's very disruptive and Welch did not refrain from criticizing his Republican counterparts and the Trump administration for what he described as a non-transparent election process. He added that there was little in the



U.S. Representative Peter Welch visited Craftsbury to meet with town officials and farmers. He met with the Breadbasket Committee, Sund Hay Club at the Craftsbury Public House, and Pete Simonds of Pine's Orchers. Left to right: Kristin Fountain (Broad Board Committee), U.S. Rep. Peter Welch, David Snow (Breadbasket Committee), Jim Jones (Select Board), and Bruce Lee (Chair, Select Board).

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Cabot School Board Hurdles Budget Meeting

by Ray Small

CABOT — The Cabot School Board held an informational meeting to discuss the revised school budget in preparation for Thursday's second attempt to gain voter approval for school funding.

Approximately 20 people including school board members, gathered in the school's library on Monday night. The agenda was to review the new proposed budget numbers and to highlight the differences between the first and second version of the budget. School board chair Chris Torney led the first part of the meeting, detailing the changes in a slide presentation.

Torney said, "I'm trying to balance what is needed for the school with the community's ability to support it."

The proposed expenditures for 2018-19 total \$3,666,885, an increase of \$24,100, or seven percent, over the previous year. The budget that was voted down on Feb. 16 was \$3,642,785, an increase of 18.6 percent.

Reductions in the new proposal include a community connections coordinator (\$28,000), a part-time custodian (\$24,000), and a reduction of funds from a new elementary counselor (\$24,000) total \$76,000. Proposed increases include more funding for instructional salaries and benefits that are mandated, a reduction in the number of days for a high school senior capstone project coordinator (\$27,000), special education (\$134,400), a new elementary counselor (\$43,710), technology spending for mandated software upgrades and student laptops (\$16,000), and a Supervisory Union assessment (\$11,700).

The increase in special education is due to the increasing number of students who require special education services. Similarly, the additional money for the elementary counselor is based on the need to provide support and counseling for students in grades 4 through grade 6.

The proposed budget will increase the local Homestead Tax Rate from \$1,737.7 to \$1,802.89 per \$100 of assessed property value, a 3.9 percent increase. According to the figures in Torney's presentation, the Homestead Tax Rate is driven by factors largely beyond the school board's control. Education spending is determined by the school board. However, the number of equalized pupils is determined by enrollment. The estimated property yield, the Vermont Base Education tax rate and Cabot's Common Level of Appraisal are all set by the state. The budget also reflects education costs spending penalty, which increases the budget increase from 7.9 percent to the final 9.9 percent figure.

Torney emphasized that in 2017, 347 Cabot households received property tax reductions by paying according to household income, rather than homestead. He said that approximately three-quarters of Cabot households pay property taxes based on household level. His analysis states that households paying the Homestead Tax based on income will see an increase of three to seven percent. For these households, the Homestead Tax will increase \$65 to \$10,000 of household income.

The meeting was opened for discussion at the conclusion of the presentation. Torney, Washington Northeast Supervisory Union Superintendent Mark Tucker and Cabot School Principal David Schneider were present. Lisa Larsen said what affected her.

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Matt Willett of Matt's Buxton Meats in Walden, checks out the grade of syrus he is producing. He has raised 725 gallons so far for his 2,200 cows.

Select Board Meeting Starts with Show of Support for Police Chief

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK — Last week's select board meeting started with a show of support for police chief Aaron Cochran. Cochran spoke about his \$5.5 at the stationhouse, as part of a new conference held by Vermont State Control on March 27. \$5.5, officially titled "An Act Relating to the Dispensation of Unlawful and Abandoned Firearms," is part of a set of school safety and firearms control laws supported by Governor Phil Scott.

The select board received at least one letter protesting that Chief Cochran participated in the news conference while wearing his uniform. Resident Mark Salls was one of the writers. "We heard that a few people wrote letters to the select board about him going down and testifying in uniform against this bill. In my opinion, he didn't do anything wrong, he just went down to support what he was representing. He's wearing his uniform," he said. "I don't think he was representing the town, but he never once said that. Most of these people are sending him for doing what he felt

was right, and we don't see anything wrong with what he did. Lawrence Hanel also weighed in.

"I was proud to have somebody in that room that actually knew the law and what he was talking about because most of the people who were passing these laws had no idea what they were passing; they just had the idea that they had to do something."

In all, about a dozen residents spoke on Cochran's behalf. The chief also thanked everyone for their support. "I do appreciate it. I did stand up for what I thought was right and what was right for you," he said. "I'd do it again in a heartbeat. It's good to know that somebody thinks that I did something right, we in law enforcement often don't hear very much being said in green energy, whereas the town's electric utility manager, Mike Sullivan, advised that it will drive up energy costs for the utility and, therefore, ratepayers."

"We have conflicting information," board member Brian Hule said. "As was mentioned during the safety assessment ordered by Development, board member Brian Hule said that local school safety is looking at evaluating the ALICE Training (Active Shooter Re-

sponse Training)."

"Instead of acting like sheep in the corner, so to speak, where they look the doors and hide in a corner, pull the shades, this is a different type of training," he said. "They teach them essentially to fight for their lives, because they were passing these laws had no idea what they were passing; they just had the idea that they had to do something."

At another point in his report, he talked about the emergence of marijuana laced with opiates. "I don't see anybody has heard on the news back a few weeks ago, but marijuana laced with opiates is showing up in Vermont and some of the people who were passing these laws had no idea what they were passing; they just had the idea that they had to do something."

There was updated discussion on a new assessment ordered by Development. Board member Brian Hule said that local school safety is looking at evaluating the ALICE Training (Active Shooter Re-

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Hardwick Area Food Pantry Welcomes New Executive Director

by Michael Bielawski

WIKSTROM said her background is in gardening and therapeutic work with adults. Her experience in helping people in need started in her native Scotland where she and her American wife volunteered for Newton Edge, an organization that focuses on adults with special needs.

Moving from Scotland, the couple first lived in California and then moved to locations throughout the United States, including Missouri, St. Louis, and Alaska. She said she tried to get into similar work in other parts of the country, but the state did not have as available as it does in Vermont.

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